

The Smithsonian and the *Enola Gay*

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The *Enola Gay* and the Smithsonian **Chronology of the Controversy** **1993-1995**

Early 1993. National Air & Space Museum, planning for the exhibition in 1995 of the *Enola Gay*, the B-29 that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, has two concept documents in circulation: (1) "[Hiroshima and Nagasaki: A Fiftieth Anniversary Exhibit at the National Air and Space Museum](#)" and (2) "[Fifty Years On.](#)"

1993. Curators produce longer and more definitive concept document, "[The Crossroads: The End of World War II, the Atomic Bomb, and the Onset of the Cold War.](#)"

Aug 1, 1993. *Air Force Magazine*, journal of the Air Force Association, publishes "In Aviation's Attic," a pictorial feature on aircraft restoration by the Air & Space Museum. The *Enola Gay* is pictured on the cover.

Aug. 6, 1993. *Air Force Magazine* receives appeal from B-29 veterans concerned about Smithsonian's planned exhibition of *Enola Gay* and who have collected 5,000 signatures petitioning the museum to display the airplane proudly.

Aug. 20, 1993. Director of the Air & Space Museum, Martin Harwit, calls the Executive Director of Air Force Association, Monroe Hatch, seeking support for the exhibit.

Sept. 12, 1993. Executive Director Hatch expresses AFA's disagreement with the museum's concept for exhibition in a [letter to Martin Harwit](#).

Nov. 19, 1993. At request of Director of Air & Space Museum, AFA Executive Director Hatch and *Air Force Magazine* Editor John T. Correll meet with Harwit and exhibition curators. ([Correll Nov. 23 Memo for Record of Meeting](#))

Jan. 12, 1994. Air & Space museum completes Draft Exhibition Script No. 1, "The Crossroads: The End of World War II, the Atomic Bomb, and the Origins of the Cold War."

Mid-January 1994. *Air Force Magazine* receives a copy of Exhibition Script No. 1 from undisclosed sources.

Jan. 31, 1994. The Director of the Air & Space Museum forwards a copy of Draft Exhibition Script No. 1 to Air Force Association.

Feb. 8, 1994. The Editor of *Air Force Magazine* interviews the Director of the Air & Space Museum for an article on the exhibit.

March 15, 1994. Air Force Association releases special report, "[The Smithsonian and the *Enola Gay*](#)," a longer version of two *Air Force Magazine* articles forthcoming in the April issue.

March 31, 1994. *Washington Times* quotes Air & Space Director Harwit, who says AFA's characterization of the exhibition script is "not true."

April 2, 1994. *Air Force Magazine* publishes the articles that brought the museum's plans to public attention, "War Stories at Air & Space" and a historical companion piece, "The Decision That Launched the *Enola Gay*."

April 4, 1994. AFA provides copy of Exhibition Script No. 1 to *Washington Times* "so that you may judge for yourself." (See March 31 item.)

April 7, 1994. At request of Congressional staffers, Air Force Association produces [content analysis](#) of the museum's Exhibition Script No. 1.

April 16, 1994. In an internal memo ("[Comments on Crossroads](#)"), the Director of the Air & Space Museum agrees with critics that the exhibit lacks balance, says "much of the criticism that has been levied against us is understandable." Publicly, museum officials disparage criticism as unfair and inaccurate.

April 22, 1994. Air & Space Director appoints an internal "Tiger Team," which subsequently finds numerous problems and imbalances in the exhibition, including "depictions of Japanese as victims" of a United States "motivated by vengeance."

May 5, 1994. American Legion executive committee adopts resolution condemning the exhibition plan.

May 20, 1994. In a bizarre maneuver, Smithsonian and Air & Space officials appeal to the American Legion for support in the inexplicable belief that the Air Force Association "would have to defer to such giants as the American Legion."

May 31, 1994. Curators produce Draft Exhibition Script No. 2, "The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II." Air Force Association begins efforts to obtain a copy.

June 21, 1994. Publicly, Air & Space officials say that review of the exhibition plan is ongoing. Privately, Curator Michael J. Neufeld tells the museum's advisory board that the exhibition script "must be considered a finished product, minor wording changes aside."

June 23, 1994. After repeated requests, the Air Force Association finally obtains a copy of Draft Exhibition Script No. 2 and produces its [June 28 analysis](#).

July 5, 1994. Minutes of senior staff meeting at Air & Space (publicly disclosed months later) show that the exhibition script was translated into Japanese and sent by overnight mail to officials in Hiroshima and Nagasaki "asking for a quick response."

Aug. 10, 1994. Twenty-four members of Congress send letter to Smithsonian expressing "concern and dismay" that the planned exhibit portrays Japan "more as an innocent victim than a ruthless aggressor" in World War II.

Aug. 16, 1994. In meeting with senior Air Force officials, military historians, and AFA, the Director of the Air & Space Museum says that, contrary to curator's statement on June 21, the exhibition script will be revised substantially. (AFA's [Aug. 17 Memo for the Record](#) of the meeting.)

Aug. 17, 1994. Director of National Air & Space Museum tells veterans' groups of numerous changes made or planned for the exhibition script in a [letter with attachment](#).

Aug. 17, 1994. National Commander of American Legion says Legion "remains unequivocally opposed" to the museum's plan for exhibition of the *Enola Gay*.

Aug. 23, 1994. Air & Space Director Harwit tells Air Force senior historian that he has taken another look at latest script and concluded that while there were "some word changes here and there," he had been "taken aback at how little had been done." ([HQ USAF/HO memo](#))

Aug. 24, 1994. AFA Executive Director Hatch, in a [letter](#), declines invitation to participate in a review at the "line-in, line-out" level, telling Air & Space Museum Director Harwit that the problems with the exhibition are structural and fundamental, not minor and technical.

Aug. 31, 1994. Draft Exhibition Script No. 3. (AFA's [Sept. 9 analysis](#) of Exhibition Script No. 3)

Sept. 1, 1994. At American Legion national convention, Smithsonian and Air & Space Museum officials propose Legion participation in a line-by-line review process of the exhibition script.

Sept. 9, 1994. AFA provides Analysis of Exhibition Script No. 3 ([AFA further actions memo](#), dated Sept. 19)

Sept. 22, 1994. Smithsonian and American Legion announce a joint effort, including line-by-line evaluation of the script, to resolve the rift over the exhibition plan.

Sept. 23, 1994. A "Sense of the Senate" resolution, passed unanimously, characterizes the exhibition script as "revisionist and offensive to many World War II veterans."

Sept. 27, 1994. AFA Executive Director tells Director of Air & Space, in a [letter](#), that the problems have not been corrected and that "time is running out to obtain a consensus in favor of this exhibit."

Oct. 3, 1994. Draft Exhibition Script No. 4. (AFA's [Oct. 17 analysis](#))

Oct. 19, 1994. Air Force Association, The Retired Officers Association, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars meet with Smithsonian and Air & Space leadership in an attempt to resolve differences.

Oct. 26, 1994. Draft Exhibition Script No. 5. (AFA's [Oct. 28 analysis](#))

Nov. 16, 1994. Forty-eight "historians and scholars" ask Smithsonian Secretary Michael Heyman not to yield to pressure from the Air Force Association, the American Legion, and others that would lead to "intellectual corruption."

Nov. 23, 1994. Air Force Association meets with the Under Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution to discuss ways to resolve problems with the exhibition.

Dec. 6, 1994. Museum drafts script for "Section 000" segment, "The War in the Pacific," to be added to the beginning of the exhibit. (AFA's [Dec. 28 analysis](#))

Dec. 13, 1994. Seven members of Congress write to the Smithsonian, expressing "deep displeasure" with handling of the exhibition plans to date.

Dec. 15, 1994. Air Force Association, The Retired Officers Association, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars meet again with Smithsonian and Air & Space leadership in another attempt to resolve differences.

Jan. 9, 1995. Despite assurances from Smithsonian that the museum would make no more uncoordinated changes to the script, Air & Space Director Harwit—on academic advice—unilaterally changes the script, reducing by 75 percent the estimate of American casualties that would have resulted from an invasion of Japan.

Jan. 18, 1995. American Legion calls for cancellation of exhibit and a Congressional investigation of the controversy.

Jan. 20, 1995. Air Force Association calls for cancellation of the exhibit.

Jan. 24, 1995. Eighty-one members of Congress call for Martin Harwit to resign as Director of the Air & Space Museum.

Jan. 30, 1995. Smithsonian cancels the exhibit, begins work on a completely different plan for display of the *Enola Gay*.

April 6, 1995. Smithsonian abruptly cancels a reception—planned by Air & Space Museum Director Harwit without informing Smithsonian leaders—to honor the curators of the original, failed exhibit.

May 2, 1995. At the request of the Secretary of the Smithsonian, Martin Harwit resigns as director of the Air & Space Museum.

June 28, 1995. Air & Space Museum puts the forward fuselage of the *Enola Gay* and other items on display as part of a straightforward historical exhibition. Within a year, it draws more than a million visitors—making it, by far, the most popular special exhibition in the history of the Air & Space Museum. (*When the exhibition finally closed in May 1998, it had drawn almost four million visitors.*)